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THE STORY OF AḤIḲAR AND THE BOOK OF DANIEL.

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Within the last few years a story long known in the Arabian *Thousand and One Nights* has turned out to be of unexpected interest to the biblical student. In 1880 Georg Hoffmann pointed out the identity of Achiacharus of Tobit 1:21 *sqq.*; 11:18, and 14:10, with a legendary sage, Aḥiḱar, who figured in a romance extant in certain Syriac MSS. as a vizier of Sennacherib.¹

Since that time, through the labors of Jagić, Conybeare, Salhani, Mrs. Lewis, and J. Rendel Harris, versions of the tale as preserved in Slavonic, Armenian, Arabic, and Syriac have been placed within our reach, while the acute criticisms of Meissner,² Lidzbarski,³ Dillon,⁴ and Harris⁵ have proved the tale to be older than the book of Tobit, and have demonstrated that the latter is dependent upon it. It is to Dillon and Harris that we are especially indebted for this demonstration. To the latter we are also indebted for having, with the aid of the other editors mentioned above, placed within our reach, in his volume on Aḥiḱar, the various versions of the story. The same scholar has also pointed out that if the book is older than Tobit it is also older than Daniel, and has collected, as noted below, a number of expressions common to the two works.

The substance of the tale is as follows :

Aḥiḱar, a vizier of Sennacherib, was possessed of wealth, wisdom, popularity, and power, but had no son. After vainly praying for one he was directed to adopt his nephew Nadan and to find in him the fulfilment of his prayers. This he did, rearing the child tenderly and

¹ Cf. Achiacharus in *Encyc. Bib.* and J. Rendel Harris' *Story of Aḥiḱar*, p. xiii.

² *ZDMG.*, Vol. XLVIII, pp. 171-97.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 671-5.

⁴ *Contemporary Review*, Vol. LXXIII, pp. 362-86.

⁵ *The Story of Aḥiḱar*, Cambridge University Press, 1898.

instructing him in wisdom, the precepts of which are recounted to us at length. Nadan proved to be wilful and ungrateful. At length, when Aḥiḱar contemplated supplanting him by his younger brother, he forged treasonable letters in Aḥiḱar's handwriting, pretended to the king that he found them, and procured Aḥiḱar's condemnation to death. On a previous occasion Aḥiḱar had saved from the wrath of Sennacherib the very person who was now directed to cut off his head. An appeal to this man's gratitude persuaded him to slay a slave in Aḥiḱar's stead, while the latter was incarcerated in a dungeon under his own house, where he was tormented by the audible evidences of abuse of his property, his slaves, and his wife in which Nadan indulged. Meantime the king of Egypt, hearing of Aḥiḱar's death, sent to Sennacherib a series of absurd and impossible demands, such as eastern story-tellers attribute to powerful sovereigns, accompanied by veiled threats of detriment to Assyria in case his demands were not fulfilled. No one was able to tell Sennacherib what to do, and in his extremity the king was glad to reward Aḥiḱar's executioner for not putting him to death. Aḥiḱar was then brought forth from his dungeon, with "the color of his face changed, his hair matted like a wild beast, and his nails like the claws of an eagle." When he had recuperated Aḥiḱar went to Egypt, by his wisdom successfully met or baffled the king of Egypt in his demands, and thus delivered Assyria. When he returned to Assyria with enhanced reputation, Nadan was delivered to him for punishment; he flogged him, imprisoned him in the very dungeon where Aḥiḱar had himself been entombed, gave him some more instruction, and when the final punishment was ready for him Nadan swelled up and burst asunder, thus taking himself out of the way.

The story has been distorted in one way or another in each of the versions of it, so that a comparison of them all is necessary in order to bind together its different strands again. The publication of the different versions side by side in a convenient volume by Dr. Harris happily makes this possible.

If now the story is older than Tobit (a point demonstrated by Dillon and Harris), it is also older than Daniel, and the inquiry as to whether the latter book may not be in some respects dependent upon Aḥiḱar becomes a legitimate one. Dr. Harris has already pointed out⁶ a number of verbal parallels between the two. Thus in the Armenian version (p. 25), "I clad him in byssus and purple; and a gold collar did I bind around his neck," is very similar to "clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck" of Dan. 5:7, 16. So the statement in the Arabic (p. 87), "he assembled the astrologers, the learned men, and the wizards," resembles Dan. 5:7, "The king cried aloud to

⁶ *Story of Aḥiḱar*, p. lviii.

bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers" (*cf.* Dan. 2:2, 27). Again the Armenian, "This is a matter that even the gods cannot settle or give answer to" (p. 44), which in the Arabic runs, "The gods themselves cannot do things like these; let alone men," is exactly parallel to "There is none who can show it before the king except the gods" (Dan. 2:11). Lastly the description of Aḥīkar with his nails grown like eagles' talons and his hair matted like a wild beast, which, in one form or another, runs through all the versions of the story (*cf.* pp. 17, 45, 73, 103), not only reminds one strongly of the description of the hair and nails of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:30), but appears, as Harris has shown (p. lix), in a more original form than in the book of Daniel. He further points out that the fact that in Aḥīkar's description of the wise men "Chaldeans" had not yet become a technical term for a sage, as it has in Daniel, is a further argument for the priority of Aḥīkar.

All these points the acute critic of Aḥīkar has admirably taken; but one wonders why he did not go on a step farther; for when we come to the more fundamental parallels between plots and methods of treatment, the story of Aḥīkar becomes even more vitally interesting to the student of Daniel than before.

The first of these points to be noted is that Daniel was a wise man, like Aḥīkar, excelling all others in wisdom, and, like him, vizier to his sovereign, whoever that sovereign might be. Granting the priority of Aḥīkar, is there not a sign of dependence here?

The story of Aḥīkar's fall from the pinnacle of power, his unjust incarceration in a pit under his house, his deliverance, and the imprisonment of his accuser in the same pit, is exactly parallel to Daniel's fall from like power, his imprisonment in the lions' den, his deliverance, and the casting of his accusers to the lions—a story which has been worked up in one way in Dan., chap. 6, where Darius, the Mede, is the king, and in another way in the apochryphal *Bel and the Dragon*, where Cyrus is the king. The story of Aḥīkar makes it probable that we now have the pattern on which this narrative of Daniel was constructed.

In my opinion we should add to these the story of the three Hebrews and the fiery furnace in Dan., chap. 3, a narrative in which we find three men at the height of power caught by a trick and unjustly thrown into a furnace, from whence they are miraculously

delivered. The parallelism is not quite complete in this case, since the accusers do not finally receive the fate which they have brought upon Daniel, but it is practically completed by the decree that whoever "spake anything amiss against the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego shall be cut in pieces and his house shall be made a dunghill" (Dan. 3:29).⁷ I expressed, more than two years ago, the opinion that Dan., chaps. 3 and 6, were independent parallel traditions, rather than connected stories, remarking "the same germ is found in both—the story of mortal danger induced by the interdiction of Israel's religion, from which deliverance is effected by miracle. This germ developed differently in the different traditions until, when it assumed literary form under the impetus of the persecution of Antiochus, in one center it was connected with Nebuchadnezzar and a fiery furnace, with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego for heroes; and in another center in the hands of a different writer it was connected with Darius the Mede and a lions' den, with Daniel as the hero."⁸ The story of Ahiḳar confirms that opinion in so far as it supplies the common element of the two stories, giving us the model on which they were no doubt formed. It reveals, however, a fact which I did not then suspect—that this common element had nothing to do with Daniel or with religion, but was employed because it was a popular model, and because its plot readily lent itself to the expression of the lessons of fidelity to duty and faith in the triumph of right, which the writers desired to teach. Whence their material came we shall consider below.

Another point in which Ahiḳar possibly became a model for the writers of Daniel is his ability to solve riddles. If not the model for Daniel in this respect, he exhibits what was demanded of the traditional wise man of the time; Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams in Genesis, on which the narratives of Daniel have often been thought to be modeled, prove that the tendency to require such power from wise men was a Hebrew trait much older than either Ahiḳar or Daniel. What the newly found story really does for us in this respect is to make it clear that the atmosphere in the time when Daniel was written was surcharged with this conception of wisdom and its power.

⁷ Dr. Harris privately reminds me that in folklore tales the villain is frequently cut in pieces, and also frequently, like Nadan, in the Ahiḳar story, and Judas, in Acts 1:18, he swells up and bursts.

⁸ *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. XVII, p. 71.

Viewing the subject broadly, the story of Ahiḳar comes as the last element needed to enable us to conjecture how the stories in Daniel took shape :

1. There was the general situation of the persecution of Antiochus to be met ; Israelites had great need to be encouraged to fidelity, and obviously the best method of doing this would be to bring before their minds the examples of those who had been faithful under similar suffering at the hands of a foreign oppressor. This would naturally turn the mind of a writer to the exile. If the encouragement were to be effective, it was necessary to give a philosophy of history which would assure the righteous of ultimate triumph ; this led to the apocalyptic method.

2. Gunkel has shown us that much of the material employed in apocalyptic writings, called out by this and similar occasions, is drawn from Babylonian sources ;⁹ while Terry,¹⁰ Charles,¹¹ and others rightly hold that unfulfilled prophecy was also an important source of apocalyptic. Both kinds of material found its way into Daniel. The Babylonian was employed especially by the writer whom I have elsewhere¹² called A, while the prophetic is found throughout the book.¹³

3. When Daniel was written apocalyptic writing had already begun. As Charles has shown,¹⁴ Ethiopic Enoch, chaps. 1-36, was already in existence. The fashion was thus set of attaching such works to the names of worthies who had lived long ago. Enoch, however, would not answer the purpose of the present emergency, for his place was too firmly fixed by the Pentateuch among the antediluvians to permit even an apocalypticist to transfer him to the exile or to any other period when Israel was in subjection to a foreign monarch. Tradition had, though, passed on the name of an old patriarch, Daniel (Ezek. 14:14), of whom, if anything was known beyond the fact that he had a reputation for wisdom and righteousness, it has not been transmitted to us. He was taken, transferred to the exile, and, after apocalyptic fashion, made the mouthpiece of the writer's faith and hopes. That this

⁹ *Schöpfung und Chaos*, pp. 235-398.

¹⁰ *Biblical Apocalypitics*, p. 6 and *passim*.

¹¹ *Eschatology, Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian*, pp. 170 sq.

¹² *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. XVII, pp. 79 sqq.

¹³ Cf. chaps. 3, 6, and 9 ; also Bevan's *Daniel*, pp. 78 sqq. ; Peters, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. XV, pp. 109 sqq. ; also the commentaries on chap. 9.

¹⁴ *The Book of Enoch*, 1893, pp. 26 and 56.

is really what happened is confirmed by the apocryphal History of Susanna,¹⁵ in which Daniel appears simply as a judge of unusual wisdom—a rôle readily suggested by his name. No reference is made to the contents of our canonical book. The existence of this story shows that apart from apocalyptic material nothing was known of Daniel except what could be inferred from the meaning of his name.

4. Just here the story of Aḥiḳar comes to our aid to show whence the outline of the life of the patriarch, who to Ezekiel was an ancient figure like Noah and Job (Ezek. 14:14), came, when Daniel had been transferred to the exile. Here ready to the writer's hand was the life of Aḥiḳar. The scene had to be changed from the court of Sennacherib to that of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, since the Israel which had returned from exile had suffered in Babylon; but when once transferred the outline of the Aḥiḳar story became the skeleton which gave form to all the material within the reach of the writers who devoted themselves to this task. It was thus, probably, that the Aḥiḳar skeleton, rechristened as Daniel, and given flesh, partly from the material of the Babylonian cosmogonic epic and partly from the unfulfilled prophecies of the past, lived again to minister comfort and to inspire with hope those who were engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the right to worship the God of their fathers according to their consciences.

I may add in conclusion that this view does not modify the views I have previously expressed of the composite character of the book of Daniel,¹⁶ since the use of the story of Aḥiḳar by the author of Tobit shows that it was well known; it no doubt formed a part of the intellectual equipment of the intelligent Jew of the time.

¹⁵ Cf. Peters in the *New World*, March, 1900, p. 186.

¹⁶ *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. XVII, pp. 62-86.